Unit .31

Session .04

The Church Is Sent to Demonstrate Faith

Scripture

Hebrews 11:1-2, 32-40; 12:1-2

1 Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. **2** For by this our ancestors were approved. ... **32** And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, **33** who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. **36** Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. **38** The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. **39** All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us. ... **1** Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, **2** keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Intro Options

Main Point:
When your faith is in Jesus, your life will show it.

Option 1

Break your students up into groups of two or three. Give each group one of the following words at random:

Reliance

Dependence

Trust

Faith

Confidence

Each group now has two minutes to come up with an action demonstrating whatever word they got. These skits don't need to be deep or profound; an action of trust might be waiting for the bus at a certain time because you trust the bus to be there. Let them share their actions. See how much overlap exists between the skits on faith and the rest. Ask the students if they think the other words are synonyms for faith. Why or why not? A big idea to come from these skits (hopefully) is that faith banks on a particular object: that someone will show up when she says she will, that a piece of furniture will support us, that the postal service will deliver our check. Hebrews 11 will give us a definition of faith; on what does the Christian's faith bank or rely?

Option 2

Option 2:Ask your students to come up with examples of someone with long-term goals. They can show their examples either in short skits (if they want to work in a group) or in a drawing (if they want to work alone). Some examples include someone developing his or her athleticism to make it onto a major league team; someone saving up money to buy a car; someone maintaining a long-distance relationship. Have them share.

Ask the students if they would consider their skits and drawings demonstrations of faith. Point out that in their examples, people are making definitive choices and actions because they are trusting in something: the athlete is trusting in her ability, if she can just develop it enough; the saver is trusting that the price of the car will remain achievable; the long-distance significant other is trusting the other person will wait for him or her.

In today's session, we'll see how people made specific choices and banked on a future hope (which is how Hebrews defines faith). That faith is how we are approved by God.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Hebrews 11:1-2.

Faith is not a subjective feeling or fleeting hope. It is not based on opinion, wishful thinking, or optimism that something will happen according to plan. Rather, it is a confident assurance based on the belief that God always keeps His word. In particular, faith clings to God and His Word for the fulfillment of God's promises and plans in the days to come.

- **What are some things we put our faith in every day?**

We put our faith in things all the time. We have faith that our brakes will engage when we touch the pedal, that the harness of the roller coaster will hold us, etc. It is impossible to live without faith. We all have faith—the question is, what is your faith in?

- **What does Hebrews 1:2 teach us about the role of faith before the new covenant in the Old Testament?**

There is a common misconception that the old covenant was about works and law, while the new covenant is about faith and grace. While we shouldn't oversimplify the complicated relationship between the covenants, we should be clear that humanity's approval before God has always depended upon faith. For example, Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gal. 3:6). As we will see, Hebrews 11 thoroughly demonstrates the importance of faith throughout all generations.

Read Hebrews 11:32-40.

The author of Hebrews doesn't have enough time to recount all the stories of faith, but he goes on to briefly mention a few more from the Old Testament.

- **Which contrast stands out to you in verses 33-37?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

Faith

Biblical faith is resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
When your faith is in Jesus, your life will show it.

Hebrews 11

11:1-2. As one writer describes this idea, "Faith has at its core a massive sense of certainty."[1]

Hebrews 11:2 sets the stage for the list of faith heroes beginning in Hebrews 11:4, and it also shows that faith brings God's approval. He looks with favor on those who walk in faith; He delights when His people trust Him with full confidence and follow Him accordingly. We will see in the remainder of Hebrews 11 the names and stories of multiple men and women whose lives illustrated this kind of trust. They followed Him each day as they trusted His promises for tomorrow.

11:39. There is a similar example of the relationship between faith and works elsewhere in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 3:17-18 says they didn't enter promise because they "sinned" and were "disobedient," but verse 19 says they were unable to enter because of "unbelief." So, which one was it? Did they fail to enter because of rebellion and disobedience, or unbelief? The answer is both. Unbelief was the condition of their hearts, so rebellion was the condition of their lives. Unbelief was the root, and disobedience was the fruit. The same is true of the saints in Hebrews 11. Faith was the condition of their hearts, so obedience and perseverance (in victory and defeat) was the condition of their lives. They were approved through a faith that was demonstrated in their works.

Activity

Break your students into small groups for skits. Assign each group, at random, one of the three main points from the lesson:

- Defining faith
- Being approved by faith
- Enduring in faith

Each group should create two scenes; in the first scene, they show a wrong understanding of their assigned point; in the second scene, they correct that understanding. A group with defining faith might show faith as a blind, vague hope in their first example; in the second, they might show someone banking on a specific promise, like that not lying will work out better for him in the long run.

1.R. Kent Hughes, Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul, Volume 1 (Preaching the Word) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993).

In Defense (p. 34, DDG)

We can see here that the gospel of Jesus Christ is neither a poverty gospel nor a prosperity gospel. The poverty gospel says that if you follow God, you will be poor and die a martyr. The prosperity gospel says that if you follow God, you will be rich and nothing bad will ever happen to you. The true gospel, however, says that whatever happens as we follow God—good or bad—is in His hands. The result may be that we die for his sake, or it may be that we experience great blessing in this life, but either way, God is in control of the outcome of our faith and uses it for His glory and our good. Abel died far too young; Enoch never died, but God had the final word on both of their lives. God truly is the author and finisher of our faith.

TEACHING PLAN

The writer does not limit his examples of faith just to those who seemed to prosper in life. Instead, he unexpectedly and abruptly shifts to illustrate faith that is costly. Some conquered kingdoms, while others were martyred. Some were war heroes, and others died without even giving resistance. We do not determine the earthly outcome of our faithfulness. For some it may be celebratory, while for others it may be sorrowful. Our role is to simply be faithful and leave the results to God.

- **What do these examples teach us about the relationship between our faith and our works?**

The author of Hebrews gives example after example about how the Old Testament believers lived, and yet he concludes by saying "all these were approved through their faith" (Heb. 11:39). No one has perfect obedience, but God says that true faith will reveal itself through obedience. Faith cannot stay hidden in the heart—it will come out in your life. Yes, you are saved by faith, but that faith is going to reveal itself through obedience.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

We are surrounded by an innumerable amount of people whose lives, and often, deaths, bear witness to the truthfulness of God. But how can their lives "witness" God's faithfulness to His people if we never look at them, or don't remember them? We have to be careful students of the Bible and of church history so that we do not lose sight of the heritage of faith that has paved the way for us.

- **Who in the Scriptures or in your life has inspired you to trust God and live for Jesus?**

The author challenges us to "lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us" (Heb. 12:1). We all have sin in our lives that we need to turn away from so that we can take hold of the freedom Jesus has died to secure for us. However, there may also be obstacles in our lives that are not necessarily sinful, but are "hindrances" that keep us from running the race well.

It could be a hobby, an interest, a relationship, a certain goal, or a career path. It could be many things. There are many good things, but those things may be keeping us from the best thing if we aren't careful. We can not allow anything to hinder us from living for Christ and His mission.

The greatest motivation of all is not the saints of history, but the Savior Himself. Keep your eyes on the One who endured the cross, but is now seated at the right hand of God. What an example of perseverance and evidence that God will be faithful! Jesus went from shame to glory, and all those who run with faith will be glorified with Him.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
When your faith is in Jesus, your life will show it.

Hebrews 12

12:1. This chapter begins with "therefore," indicating that the writer wants to connect what he has previously written together with his direction to run the race well. Their faithfulness remains a witness to the grace and power of God long after they died, and the writer of Hebrews points back to them as examples of faith. As God took care of His followers in chapter 11, He takes care of His people in the present. The readers of Hebrews can then press on in faith because they know others before them persevered to the end.

12:1-2. The "race" imagery is not uncommon in the Scriptures (see 1 Cor 9:24-27, 2 Tim 4:7-8), and the call to endurance reverberates throughout the Book of Hebrews (10:32-39). Like runners who receive and hand off the baton, believers learn from others before them, and, in turn, teach others after them.

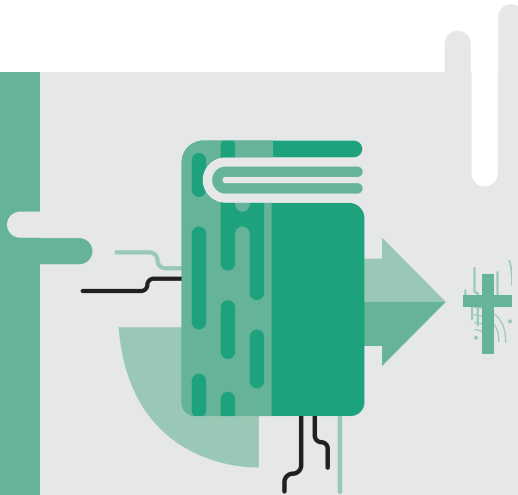
The word translated as "endurance" suggests arduous effort, even with ongoing struggles and strong opposition. The race is a long one rather than a sprint, and believers are to keep driving toward the finish line. Thus, the original recipients of the Book of Hebrews would have heard this as a reminder not to give up or turn back; they were to press on even in the midst of opposition. Their goal was to say, like Paul, at the end of their lives, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

"The cloud of witnesses had a course to run, and they ran it to the end. But their running cannot suffice for others. The picture is that of a relay race. Those who have run have on to us the redemptive purpose of God which must be carried forward in our generation, at the end of which we, in turn, shall pass it on to others."[2]

2.Herschel H. Hobbs, Studies in Hebrews (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1954).

(p. 33, DDG) Christ Connection

The examples of faithful men and women in Scripture are a source of strength and encouragement, but they pale in comparison to the life of Jesus Christ, who endured the cross and its shame with His future glory and joy in mind. Because of Christ's work, our faith and the hope of all who have believed will be fulfilled when He returns. We have assurance of the reliability of God's promises.



LESSON 91: PERSEVERANCE
SENT TO DEMONSTRATE FAITH
Hebrew 11:1-2, 32-40; 12:1-2

SENT TO DEMONSTRATE FAITH
When your faith is in Jesus, your life will show it.

JESUS CONNECTION
The examples of faithful men and women in the Bible are a source of strength and encouragement that points us to Jesus. He endured the cross and its shame because He knew glory and joy waited on the other side. In the same way, we can also endure, knowing that our faith, and the hope of all who have believed, will be fulfilled when He returns.

LIFEWISE QUALITY
PERSEVERANCE – Not giving up despite difficulties, failure or opposition.

HEAD
According to Hebrews 11:1, what is the definition of faith?

Who makes up the "large cloud of witnesses?" How did they show their faith in God?

HEART

Just like a runner puts aside everything that distracts him to keep his focus on the finish line, we are to lay aside every sin or distraction that keeps us from following Jesus. What thoughts, sins or distractions tempt you to give in when you face hard things?

How does it help us to persevere in our faith when we remember the examples of the “cloud of witnesses”?

HANDS

In the middle of a piece of paper or card stock, write one long-term goal that you have for your life. Draw a circle around that goal. All around that circle write down things that will help you achieve that goal in one color and things that will keep you from reaching that goal in a second color. Choose one of each color and write down 2 specific ways you can build the helpful one into your or work through the obstacle so that you can persevere when you want to give up.